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Soviets exceeded SALT II limits, U.S. analysts say

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Washington — Reagan administration analysts have concluded that the Soviet Union tested an improved intercontinental missile in February that exceeds the limits imposed by the 1979 strategic arms limitation treaty known as SALT II, administration sources said yesterday.

Moscow says the weapon tested February 8 was a permissible modification of the SS-13, a single-warhead, solid-fueled rocket, the sources said. Relatively few SS-13s have been deployed.

Analysts reached their conclusion — based on U.S. intelligence data gathered from observation of the rocket flight — in the course of a comprehensive review still in progress regarding Soviet compliance with all existing arms control agreements, the sources said.

They said the evidence has not yet been put before President Reagan, and therefore no decision has been reached on whether to charge the Soviets with a violation and whether such a charge would be made publicly or in the privacy of diplomatic consultations.

The first details on what the United States knows about the February 8 test came yesterday from a former Carter administration official, William E. Jackson, Jr., who called a press conference to voice his worry that both superpowers are about to let arms control "come unraveled."

Mr. Jackson, now a scholar at the Brookings Institution here, was executive director of the General Advisory Committee on Arms Control of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency when SALT II was negotiated.

Based on his talks with officials in several government agencies, Mr. Jackson said, the missile tested February 8 exceeded SALT II limits on two counts:

• It was a new type of intercontinental ballistic missile within the definitions in the agreement. The

agreement allows only one new type of ICBM to each side, and a different missile tested October 26 was reported officially to Washington as Moscow's new one.

• Moscow has told Washington the missile tested February 8 was a modified SS-13. But analysts here have "conclusive evidence" that it goes far beyond treaty definitions of allowable modifications. The tested missile, for instance, may have twice the throw-weight — or warhead payload — of the SS-13, rather than the 5 percent difference allowed, Mr. Jackson said.

Administration sources confirmed Mr. Jackson's account.

President Reagan said in a speech in Los Angeles March 31 that there were grounds for questioning Soviet compliance with arms control agreements. "I may have more to say on this in the near future," he added.

In the seemingly escalating war of words between the superpowers on arms intentions, the Soviet defense minister, Marshal Dmitri Ustinov, said yesterday that any attack on the Soviets by European-based U.S. missiles would bring retaliation on the United States as well as on Europe.

His remarks, to soldiers in East Germany, were taken here as part of the accelerating Soviet campaign to stall off the planned deployment of U.S. Pershing 2 rockets and cruise missiles in Europe starting in December.

Marshal Ustinov's "threat" was more explicit than those of Soviet civilian leaders — who have said deployment of U.S. missiles in Europe would be countered by similar, but undefined, actions — but it was not taken as showing any change in Soviet strategic thinking.

The political and military rationale for the European missile deployments is to link — or, "couple," as statesmen put it — the Western alliance's conventional and tactical nuclear arms to the U.S.-based strategic nuclear forces. The aim is to ensure deterrence of war by making it an

unacceptable prospect no matter the level of weaponry at which it started.

At his press conference, Mr. Jackson contended the Reagan administration may be about to "torpedo" strategic arms agreements with a "public beating over the head" of the Soviets. He was referring to the president's indication that he might speak out on the compliance issue.

This would be a reversal of three previous administrations' method of taking up such questions with the Soviets in Geneva, where a Standing Consultative Commission meets.

The Reagan administration, which has always called SALT II "fatally flawed" and opposed ratification, does not want to accord it the significance that talks in Geneva might suggest, in Mr. Jackson's view. The Carter administration withdrew the treaty from consideration for ratification in the Senate after the Afghanistan invasion, but both parties have said they are complying with its provisions.